DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 994 UD 023 488

AUTHOR Fingeret, Allan L.
TITLE Teaching a Traditional Course in a College and in an Urban Educational Setting: One Instructor's History.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the New England Educational Research Organization (Rockport, ME, April 27-29, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Adult Education; *Dropouts; *Nontraditional Education; *Nontraditional Students; Postsecondary Education; Psychology; Traditional Schools; *Urban Universities
IDENTIFIERS *Rhode Island (Providence); Rhode Island College

ABSTRACT

This paper describes one instructor's experiences in teaching an introductory psychology course in a traditional college (Rhode Island College) setting and in the College's nontraditional Urban Educational Center. The students at the Center, which offered tuition-free enrollment classes in high school equivalency preparation, adult basic education, and introductory-level college subjects, ranged in age from late teenage to elderly, and were primarily from low income minority families. The sample included 368 students from both institutions who completed at least the first examination in the course between 1975 and 1980. Although both categories of students were found to perform at about the same academic level, there were far more dropouts from the non-traditional setting. (CJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243994

Teaching a Traditional Course in a College and in an Urban Educational Setting: One Instructor's History

Allan L. Fingeret

Rhode Island College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Allan L. Fingeret

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper Presented at the 1983 Annual Conference of the New England Educational Research Organization, Rockport, Maine.

UD023488

Abstract

This study compared performance of students at an inner-city educational center setting and at a traditional college setting in a college-level Introductory Psychology course. Mean first examination and final grade percentages were nearly identical for students in both settings who completed the course. However, dropouts were more numerous in the nontraditional setting and performed more poorly on the first examination than did completers.

Teaching a Traditional Course in a College and in an Urban Educational Setting: One Instructor's View

Over the last several years I have repeatedly taught an Introductory Psychology course at Rhode Island College and at the College's Urban Educational Center. Rhode Island College is a publically supported multi-purpose institution that had begun as a teacher training school, and it is typical of many such schools across the United States. The majority of its students are of traditional college age, though over the last ten years a substantial number of older students has matriculated. The Urban Educational Center was founded soon after and partially in response to the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and was begun in a church basement in inner-city Providence, Rhode Island. The Urban Educational Center offers tuition-free open enrollment classes in high school equivalency preparation, adult basic education, and introductory-level college subjects. Through repeated changes of location the Urban Educational Center has remained in inner-city Providence and continues to serve primarily a low income, heavily minority, community. Urban Educational Center students range from late teen age to elderly.

Introductory Psychology is a popular course in both traditional and nontraditional settings, and one important concern is the comparative quality of performance of students in these settings. Course records from my Introductory Psychology course at Rhode Island College and at the Urban Educational Center can be used to directly address this concern. In all sections of my Introductory Psychology Course in both settings there have been a number of relatively constant factors. My course syllabus has covered the same traditional topics and has assigned about the same amount

of reading. The textbook has remained the same for almost all sections, as have both number and type of examination. The basis of grading has also remained the same. Furthermore, I judge that I have held identical performance expectations for students at Rhode Island College and the Urban Educational Center. Though it is impossible to prove this, I can state my belief that students in nontraditional settings must be exposed to the normal demands of a college course in order to adequately self-evaluate their interest in and ability to do college work.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to compare performance of students taking Introductory Psychology in a nontraditional setting with those taking the same course in a traditional setting.

Method

Students. All students who completed at least the first examination in my Introductory Psychology course between 1975 and 1980 were included. The sample consisted of 200 students from Rhode Island College distributed over seven course sections and 169 students from the College's Urban Educational Center distributed over eight course sections. Mean class size (28.57) at Rhode Island College was significantly larger than mean class size (21.12) at the Urban Educational Center ($F = 15.59$, $df = 1/13$, $p < .01$). Both the Rhode Island College (78%) and the Urban Educational Center (85%) sample were predominantly female.

Course Procedures. My Introductory Psychology course is a traditional one semester course with one to two weeks devoted to each of the following topics - introductory definitional issues, physiological psychology, perception, learning, memory, development, testing, personality, abnormal psychology, psychotherapy, and social psychology. To each section I have

given three examinations, with each examination covering the previous one-third of course material. Approximately two-thirds of the points on an examination consist of multiple choice items, while the remaining third consists of a variety of item types (e.g. definition, short answer, short essay, drawing, graphing, etc.). Effort was made to keep examination difficulty constant for all sections. The final grade is determined by adding the points from all three examinations and assigning a letter grade. All of these procedures apply to all of the sections of Introductory Psychology described above. In addition, the same text (Understanding Human Behavior - McConnell, 1974; 1977; 1980) has been used in all but one of the sections.

Basis for Comparison. Although the mean number of possible points upon which the final grade was based did not differ between the Rhode Island College (260.71) and Urban Educational Center (254.75) samples ($F < 1$), section to section variation in total points required final points for each student to be converted to percentage of possible points for his/her section. These final grade percentages served as basis for comparison among sections, and data only from students completing all three examinations were used to compare final grade percentages. Such percentages provide a more detailed basis for comparison than would letter grades.

Results and Discussion

Final Grade Percentages. Mean final grade percentages are presented in Table 1. A preliminary analysis of variance on the Rhode Island College sections was done to determine whether there were significant differences between my three day sections and my four evening sections of Introductory Psychology. It should be pointed out that both day and night classes are

part of the regular scheduling of course offerings. Mean performance of my day and night sections did not differ significantly.

Insert Table 1 about here

($F < 1$). Therefore day and night sections were combined to form an overall Rhode Island College sample.

An analysis of variance performed on mean final grade percentage between the Rhode Island College and the Urban Educational Center samples showed no significant difference between these groups ($F < 1$). Indeed, the mean final grade percentages were nearly equal. Thus students completing my traditional Introductory Psychology course performed equivalently, regardless of whether they were enrolled in the traditional college setting or the inner-city educational center setting

Dropouts. Interpretation of the rather surprising lack of difference in these two samples may be clarified by examining the dropout rates in the two settings. I am defining dropouts as students who complete the first examination but do not complete the third. The number of students completing and dropping my Introductory Psychology course in each of the settings is presented in Table 2. Dropout rates are significantly greater at the Urban Educational Center (38%) than at Rhode Island College.

Insert Table 2 about here

(11%) ($\chi^2 = 32.77$, df = 1, $p < .01$). Taken together with final grade percentages, these data suggest that students at the Urban Educational Center are more likely to drop my Introductory Psychology course than are

students at Rhode Island College but that students in both settings who complete the course perform nearly identically.

There are a number of reasons why more students in nontraditional settings might be more likely to drop a course than would students in a traditional setting. The fact that Urban Educational Center courses are tuition-free means that these students have less monetary investment in attaining course credits. Another possible reason for differential drops is that students in nontraditional settings may be more anxious than those in traditional settings, and higher initial state anxiety has been shown to be related to dropping an Introductory Psychology course (Chandler, Cosner, & Spies, 1979). It has been found that half the adult education students dropping courses cite domestic reasons and external circumstances (e.g. job demands) as reasons for why they dropped (Shea, 1980). In addition, it is possible that students dropping courses in a nontraditional setting perform more poorly on a first examination than do students dropping courses in a traditional setting. The open enrollment policy of the Urban Educational Center might result in a higher proportion of poorly performing students. Unfortunately we know too little about students who withdraw from courses (Semb, Glick, & Spencer, 1979).

In order to examine the possibility that students in the nontraditional setting who drop my course do more poorly on the initial examination than do students in the traditional setting, I compared first examination percentages of students who completed and students who dropped in the Rhode Island College and the Urban Educational Center samples. These percentages are presented in Table 2. Analysis of variance showed significant differences on mean first examination percentage among these groups($F = 43.79, df = 3/365, p < .01$). The Least Significant Difference (LSD) procedure was used to determine the

significance of differences between pairs of means. With LSD = 5.07%, it was found that students who completed my course performed significantly better (by about 20%) on the first examination than did students who later dropped. There were no significant differences between the Rhode Island College sample and the Urban Educational Center sample for either students completing the course or students dropping the course.

Conclusion. The results of the present study show that students completing my traditional Introductory Psychology course at a nontraditional institution did not perform differently from students completing the same course at a college campus. However, a far higher percentage of students at the nontraditional setting dropped the course after the first examination. On the one hand these data suggest than in instructor may be confident that students in both types of settings who receive equivalent course credit are not performing differentially; on the other hand these data suggest that a higher proportion of poorly performing students will begin courses in a nontraditional setting. Maintaining equivalent academic standards in traditional and nontraditional settings resulted in higher dropout rates in the nontraditional setting. Even though a higher proportion of students dropped an Introductory Psychology course in a nontraditional setting, their first examination performance did not differ from students who dropped the same course in a traditional college setting.

Reflections. Though a higher proportion of students at the Urban Educational Center than at Rhode Island College dropped my Introductory Psychology course, emphasis should be placed on those students at the former setting who completed the course. The majority of these students proved successful in a typical college course, and this suggests that there may be a great value in

offering college courses in nontraditional settings to populations that might not otherwise attempt college work. Although based on a number of separate sections, the present data are based on one instructor, and the generality of these findings needs to be determined. More research on student performance in college courses offered at nontraditional institutions is needed, both generally and for Psychology courses in particular.

References

Chandler, T.A., Cosner, T., & Spies, C.A. Anxiety and attribution as predictors of non-completion of a course. Psychological Reports, 1979, 45, 413-414.

McConnell, J.V. Understanding Human Behavior. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1974.

McConnell, J.V. Understanding Human Behavior (2nd. ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1977.

McConnell, J.V. Understanding Human Behavior (3rd. ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1980.

Semb, G.B., Glick, D.M., & Spencer, R.E. Student withdrawals and delayed work patterns in self-paced Psychology courses. Teaching of Psychology, 1979, 6, 23-25.

Shea, P. The literal studies context. In Radford, J. & Rose, D. (Eds.) The Teaching of Psychology. New York: Wiley, 1980.

Table 1

Mean (and Standard Deviation) Final Grade Percentage for Rhode Island College and Urban Educational Center Samples Completing Introductory Psychology

Sample	Number Completing Course	Mean (and Standard Deviation) Final Grade Percentage
Rhode Island College-Day	83	80.42 (11.97)
Rhode Island College-Night	94	79.19 (11.26)
Rhode Island College	177	79.72 (11.51)
Urban Educational Center	107	79.76 (13.91)

Table 2

Mean (and Standard Deviation) First Examination Percentage for Rhode Island College and Urban Educational Center Samples Completing and Dropping Introductory Psychology

Sample	Number Completing Course	Mean (and Standard Deviation) First Examination Percentage	Number Dropping Course	Mean(and Standard Deviation) First Examination Percentage
Rhode Island College	177	81.34 (12.87)	23	59.21 (23.31)
Urban Educational Center	107	82.09 (12.91)	62	60.33 (20.67)